About Mental Health

JUNE 9, 2025 •

For Everyone

GET HELP NOW

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, confidential, free, 24/7/365 help is available. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. See Resources for help.

KEY POINTS

- Mental health is a key component to overall health and is closely linked to physical health.
- Factors at the individual, family, community, and society levels can influence mental health.
- CDC promotes a public health approach to prevent mental health conditions before they develop or worsen.
- If you live with a mental health condition or are experiencing mental distress, help is available.

Overview

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health.

- Mental health is closely linked to physical health.
- For example, depression increases the risk for many types of physical, long-lasting (chronic) conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for developing a mental health condition. [1]
- Addressing mental health and physical health needs can improve overall health.

Mental health is not simply the absence of a mental health condition—it is also about the presence of well-being and the ability to thrive. [2]

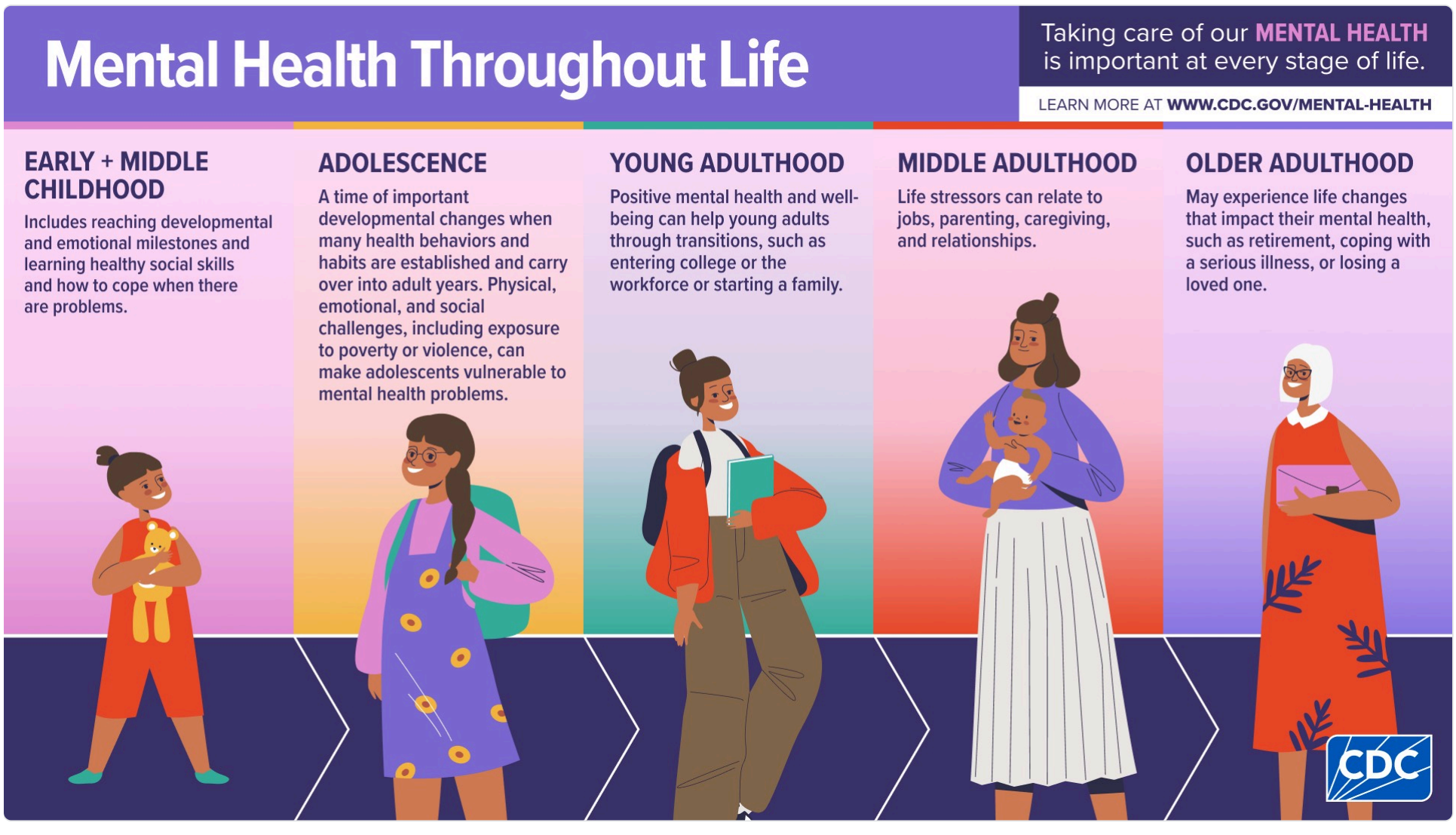
- Many factors influence our ability to thrive and experience optimal well-being, such as family and community relationships, access to opportunities, and environmental circumstances.
- You can experience positive well-being even if you are living with a mental health condition. Having access to effective treatment that helps to manage symptoms along with presence of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments can help.
- People who don't have a mental health condition may still face challenges to their mental health.

What is mental health?

Mental health is the component of behavioral health that includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. [3] Mental health is a state of well-being that enables us to cope with the stresses of life, realize our abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to our community. [4]

Taking care of our mental health is important at every stage of life.

- **Early and middle childhood (birth-11 years old):** Mental health in childhood includes reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Children who experience good mental health have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, socially, and in their communities.
- **Adolescence (12-17 years old):** Adolescence is a unique and formative time when many health behaviors and habits are established and carry over into adult years. Adolescence is also a time of important developmental changes. Physical, emotional, and social challenges, including exposure to poverty or violence, can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems.
- **Young adulthood (18-26 years old):** Early adulthood can come with major transitions such as entering college and the workforce, securing housing, or starting a family. Positive mental health and well-being in young adulthood can help young people meet these transitional changes successfully.
- **Middle adulthood (27-64 years old):** In middle adulthood, adults may face life stressors related to jobs, parenting, caregiving, and relationships.
- **Older adulthood (65+ years old):** As people age, they may experience life changes that impact their mental health, such as retirement, coping with a serious illness, or losing a loved one. Some may experience feelings of grief, social isolation, or loneliness.


Mental Health Throughout Life
Taking care of our MENTAL HEALTH is important at every stage of life.
LEARN MORE AT WWW.CDC.GOV/MENTAL-HEALTH
EARLY + MIDDLE CHILDHOOD
Includes reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems.
ADOLESCENCE
A time of important developmental changes when many health behaviors and habits are established and carry over into adult years. Physical, emotional, and social challenges, including exposure to poverty or violence, can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems.
YOUNG ADULTHOOD
Positive mental health and well-being can help young adults through transitions, such as entering college or the workforce or starting a family.
MIDDLE ADULTHOOD
Life stressors can relate to jobs, parenting, caregiving, and relationships.
OLDER ADULTHOOD
May experience life changes that impact their mental health, such as retirement, coping with a serious illness, or losing a loved one.
CDC

Taking care of our mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through young, middle, and older adulthood.

Mental Health Throughout Life

Taking care of our MENTAL HEALTH is important at every stage of life. Learn more at www.cdc.gov/mental-health

Early + Middle Childhood

Includes reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems.

Adolescence

A time of important developmental changes when many health behaviors and habits are established and carry over into adult years. Physical, emotional, and social challenges, including exposure to poverty or violence, can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems.

Young Adulthood

Positive mental health and well-being can help young adults through transitions, such as entering college or the workforce or starting a family.

Middle Adulthood

Life stressors can relate to jobs, parenting, caregiving, and relationships.

Older Adulthood

May experience life changes that impact their mental health, such as retirement, coping with a serious illness, or losing a loved one.

Risk factors

Mental health is influenced by many factors at multiple levels—individual, family, community, and society. Risk factors increase the possibility of experiencing poor mental health while protective factors increase the possibility of experiencing positive mental health.

Examples of risk factors

- Social drivers such as experiencing interpersonal and institutional discrimination
- Lack of access to housing, healthcare, education
- Lack of access to employment and economic opportunities
- Adverse childhood experiences and other types of interpersonal violence
- Social isolation
- Poor emotional well-being or coping skills
- Ongoing or chronic medical conditions, such as a traumatic brain injury, cancer, or diabetes
- Use of alcohol or drugs

Examples of protective factors

- Access to quality employment, housing, education
- Strong social connection and stable, positive relationships
- Positive coping skills
- Living in safe communities with access to preventive care and mental and physical health services

Not all people who are exposed to a risk factor experience mental distress. Risk factors for mental distress may differ from risk factors for mental health conditions. People with no known risk factors may still experience mental distress, and some may also develop a mental health condition. However, studies have shown we can improve overall mental health if we work collectively at all levels to reduce risk factors while promoting protective factors.

Risk and protective factors for mental health

Preventing risk factors and promoting protective factors are especially impactful for mental and physical health during critical developmental stages, such as in childhood and adolescence. [4]

Mental health conditions

For people who experience mental health symptoms that are serious, persistent, and interfere with daily functioning, it may indicate the presence of a mental health condition.

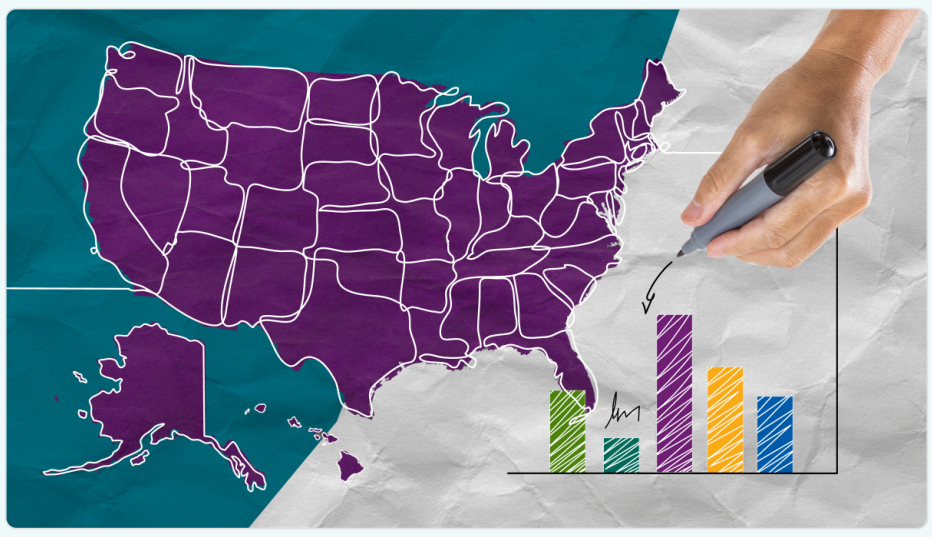
Mental health conditions are among the most common health conditions in the United States. Common mental health conditions include major depressive disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, panic disorder, and others.

- 23% or nearly 1 in 5 U.S. adults live with a mental health condition. [5]
- 6% or nearly 1 in 18 U.S. adults live with a serious mental health condition—for example, schizophrenia, bipolar, or major depression—that significantly interferes with the ability to carry out life's activities. [5]
- 20% or nearly 1 in 5 adolescents ages 12-17 have a current, diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition. [6]

A person may experience multiple mental health conditions at the same time. Mental health conditions can be present for a short period of time or last for a long time. There is no single cause for developing a mental health condition. Some mental health conditions can also be prevented.

People living with a mental health condition can get better, recover, and thrive. Whether you live with a mental health condition or are experiencing mental distress, help and support are available. Treatments are available for mental health conditions, and treatment can help reduce the symptoms and severity of mental health conditions.

Explore mental health data



Access the latest mental health and well-being data among U.S. youth and adults on CDC's Mental Health Data Channel.

What CDC is doing

Public health focuses on the underlying causes of mental distress, aiming to promote well-being and prevent mental health conditions before they develop or worsen. CDC uses its expertise in public health data, science, communications, and systems to improve the nation's mental health outcomes by improving conditions where people live, work, learn, and play.

CDC's role in promoting mental health

Public health uses a strategy that places emphasis on primary prevention to complement treatment and mental health services. Read more about CDC's prevention approach.

Key definitions

- **Mental distress** [7] is a general term for a subjective sense of discomfort, mental anguish, perceived lack of control, anxiety, or stress. This state is also known as psychological distress.
- **Well-being** [8] is a state of positive functioning and general satisfaction with life, including the presence of positive emotions. This state may also be due to economic, environmental, and social conditions that contribute to a sense of purpose and meaning.
- **Positive emotional well-being** is when people manage emotions well and have a sense of meaning, purpose, and supportive relationships. [9]
- **A mental health condition** is an illness or disorder that affects your thinking, feeling, behavior, or mood. [10] Healthcare professionals use guidelines in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to diagnose mental health conditions. [11]

Resources

- CDC's Resources for Mental Health Help and Support – A compilation of provider directories, substance use treatment locators, and mental health resources
- Mental Health and Behavior: MedlinePlus – Descriptions of many types of mental health conditions
- Health Topics - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (nih.gov) – Information about mental health topics and the latest mental health research

- Resources for Families Coping with Mental and Substance Use Disorders | SAMHSA – Audio and video files and other resource materials for families
- Get Information | Mental Health America (mhanational.org) – Information about mental health facts and conditions

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

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